

Sri Lankan Chronicle Data

- Recording, Translating and Interpreting

- A re scrutiny of erroneous assumptions regarding history of Sri Lanka.

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Prologue

I profess a religion which I not only inherit from birth but which I have also studied, examined and evaluated over a period of well over three score years and ten. For me it is not a Winter coat nor a shirt for Summer wear. No matter in which part of the world I lived, my religion has been my inseparable companion.

While I was a student at the University of Cambridge from 1949 to 1951, I lived in the midst of a host of renowned theologians like Canon Raven and Rev. Bouquet. While teaching Buddhism at the University of Toronto in Canada from 1969 to 1972, I was cross-appointed to the Department of Theology. Professionally, circumstances have never necessitated me to re-tailor my religion or dye it in a different colour. This watchful critical eye which I keep on my own religion has crossed over with me to the recent twelve years of my life as a Buddhist monk. Even today, I speak about Buddhism but not for Buddhism.

The subject of my paper forms an integral part of the study of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka which is the theme of our Conference today. This subject has engaged my attention for more than three decades. Even prior to Sri Lanka's Independence of 1948, we've heard rumblings of this ethnic tremor. Political gray-beards of the times, men who were born and bred under colonial patronage, in a culturally alienated set up in their own homeland, both before and after Independence, were probably not adequately forewarned about it. Even in their graves, these heroes of the bygone days, have to be answerable for the inestimable disaster in which the country has been plunged today. But those who knew more sensitively Sri Lankan history in proper perspective thought differently, silently though. Their voices were never heard.

Composition of the Early Sri Lankan Community

During the time the Sri Lankan chronicles like the **Dīpavamsa** and the **Mahāvamsa** were compiled about the 5th century A.D. Sri Lanka was unquestionably called **the land of the Sinhals**. The Chinese traveller monk Fa Hsien, journeying through India during the years 399 to 414 A.D., who came to Sri Lanka *circa* fifth century A.D. seems to refer to Sri Lanka as the country of Sinhala [See A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms - James Legge / Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1991. p.100 f.]. This means ' the Country of the Lion.' In

the same work, Fa Hsien translates the name of the country into Chinese as **Shih tse kuo** which means the ' **country of the lion progeny.**'

On the other hand, Hiuen Tsiang whose travels over India spread from 629 to 645 A.D. [but had not the opportunity to visit Sri Lanka] refers repeatedly to this country as Sinhala, i.e. Seng-chia-lo. [See Buddhist Records Of The Western World - Samuel Beal / Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1983. ii. p. 206 f.]. Referring to the island of Sinhala, he seems to use the Chinese characters **Chi-sse-tseu** [ibid. i. p. 188].

Taking into consideration these references by the Chinese travellers whose activities stretch over a period of two to three centuries, we are inclined to believe that they would have been necessarily backed by local traditions of at least two or three preceding centuries which held this country of Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalas, further backed by the legendary belief that these people trace back their origin to a **Lion Community [Shih-tse kuo]**. This line of thinking certainly is not due to the **Mahāvamsa** influencing the visitors to the island. Obviously the Chronicles of Sri Lanka themselves inherit a much older tradition regarding the early inhabitants of the island.

This early use of the word Sinhala to refer to the island as well as to the people of Sri Lanka, far from giving any indication with regard to the precise demographic situation of the island population, indicates the unquestioned and unassailable position of leadership of the Sinhala people in the island. We do not believe that this evidence is exclusive and shuts out the possibility of the existence of other ethnic groups in the land. With the proximity of the island to the mainland of India, it is reasonable to assume that a few people from the neighborhood of the adjacent country moved in here from time to time and soon learnt to co-exist in a spirit of friendship with the people of their new homeland. This may well be before the official introduction of Buddhism to the island during the reign of King Devānampiya Tissa [247- 207 B.C].

A bit of fragmentary evidence incidentally recorded in the **Mahāvamsa** offers a further valuable point in this direction. Chapter xix of the said Chronicle which describes in detail the arrival in Sri Lanka of the branch of the Bodhi Tree in India, refers to a Brahmin by the name of Tivakka who lived in that northern most region of the island. The Sri Lankan King Devānampiya Tissa who received this gift of the Bodhi Tree sent by his friend Emperor Asoka at the northern port of Jambukola is said to have made offerings to the Bodhi at the village of Brahmin Tivakka [*Tivakkassa Brāhamaṇassa gāmadvāre ca bhūpati thapāpetvā mahābodhim thānesu tesu tesu ca*. Mhv. Ch.xix. v. 36].

Tivakkassa Brāhamaṇassa gāmadvāre of the above quote would mean to us one of two things or both. It can mean either i. a Brahmin village to which Tivakka belongs or ii. a village [not necessarily Brahmin] of which Tivakka Brahmin is the chieftain. Both put together, he can also be a chieftain of a Brahmin village. What emerges out of this is that referring to events of six or seven centuries earlier, the **Mahāvamsa** speaks of a Brahmin or of Brahmins living in that northern part of Sri Lanka at that time. They can probably be both non-Buddhist and non-Sinhala. But they are, small though, indeed a part of the Sri Lankan community. Undoubtedly they were regarded and treated so. Collectively they seemed to have constituted a part of a co-operative friendly society.

Further proof of this amity and friendship is provided in the same Chronicle [Mhv. Ch.xix. vv 53 and 60] where we are told that the Brahmin Tivakka referred to earlier, together with many Khattiyas [K,atriya] from Kājaragāma and Candanagāma arrived in Anuradhapura for the Bodhi Tree Festival. We are further told in verses 60 and 61 that out of thirty two Bodhi saplings which were produced by the newly planted parent tree, one each were sent for planting to the townships of Tivakka Brāhmaṇa, Candanagāma and Kājaragāma. The mention here of one named Brahmin and of others as Khattiyas from two distinct localities make us guess about the existence of several other ethnic groups, non-Sinhala and apparently non-Buddhist too, who though relatively small in number, shared

with the major community the cultural life of the island.

These are best bits of evidence we can gather from our ancient chronicles regarding the peaceful co-existence of several distinct groups who integrated themselves so well with the major community, admitting their leadership and sharing their cultural heritage. Towards the furtherance of this wholesome and healthy spirit in the growth of a nation with a collectivist ideology, the ruler seems to have contributed immensely. Thus was the role played by King Devānampiya Tissa.

The New Religion and Its Cultural Impact

Quoting from the Sri Lankan chronicles, we have shown above that at the time of the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, there probably existed in the island a co-operative and peace-loving body of people whose minorities or smaller segments of different ethnic groups seem to have blended efficiently well with the majority. It is a well established fact in history that wherever Buddhism went, China, Korea and Japan in the east or Afghanistan, Bactria, Iran and Iraq in the Middle East, it carried with it a rich wave of new culture, enriching the lives of the new converts. It is well worth noting here what Sri Jawaharlal Nehru has written about this new wave of acculturation in his great classic **The Discovery of India**.

"Buddhism spread rapidly in India from Kashmir to Ceylon. It penetrated into Nepal and later reached Tibet and China and Mongolia. In India, one of the consequences of this was the growth of vegetarianism and abstention from alcoholic drinks. Till then both Brahmins and *Kshatriyas* often ate meat and took wine. Animal sacrifice was forbidden." [**The Discovery of India**, p. 105].

Here is Professor B.A. Litvinsky writing about the early impact of Buddhism in the Middle East.

"In the words of Barthold, ` neither the Sassanian state nor its official religion, Zoroastrianism, ever comprised the entire Iranian world. In the later-period cultural life of the Iranian world, Buddhist Iran played a part of no less importance than Zoroastrian Iran '. "

He further writes:

"The above gives us grounds for radically reviewing the role played by Buddhism in the history of Western Turkistan civilization. In the course of more than 500 years, from the 1st - 2nd to the 7th - 8th centuries A.C., Buddhism and the associated elements of secular culture were an important component in the life Western Turkistan society. Its impact did not come to an end with the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam. Buddhism offers a clue to the origin and essence of many phenomena of medieval (Muslim) spiritual and material culture."

Sri Lanka - Encyclopaedia of Buddhism - IV. p. 151 f.

The Healthy Growth of the Sinhala Nation.

The receptivity of the Sri Lankans, particularly of the ladies of the royal household, at grasping the fundamentals of the new religion, reveals an incredibly noteworthy high-water mark in Sri Lankan culture. Princess Anulā, the wife of the king's younger brother Mahānāga, came with five hundred women to meet Thera Mahinda on his arrival in the island, bringing the message of Buddhism. Listening to his sermons, she is said to have attained the first stage of spiritual uplift. Thereupon she informed the king that, together with her five hundred ladies, she wanted to join the higher religious life as nuns. It was a remarkable step forward in spiritual culture in human history anywhere in the world.

At this juncture, the king took very prompt action to facilitate the

establishment of an order of Buddhist nuns [*bhikkhūṇī*] in Sri Lanka. On the advice of Thera Mahinda, the king sent word to Emperor Asoka and invited Theri Saṅghamittā, i.e. Mahinda's own sister, to come to Sri Lanka and perform the task of ordaining Anulā and her court ladies, conforming to the established Vinaya traditions. Saṅghamittā, on her visit to Sri Lanka, was accompanied by several accomplished Buddhist nuns of Indian origin who are specifically referred to as being young in years [*etā daharā bhikkhūṇiyo Jambhudīpā idhāgatā*. Dpv. Ch. xviii. v. 12. See also Mhv. Ch. xix. vv. 64-84]. She also brought to Sri Lanka a branch of the sacred Bodhi Tree in India.

Thanks to the vision and wisdom of the ruler of the land, within a very short period of time after the introduction of the new religion, Sri Lanka came to possess a dedicated and vibrant body of Saṅgha of both sexes, of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. Buddhist learning and Buddhist living apparently went hand in hand. The young nuns who came from India were reputed students of the Vinaya, Dhamma and the Abhidhamma and they are reported to have recited these in the city of Anuradhapura. They obviously popularized and propagated the study of the Tripiṭaka, both in Anuradhapura and subsequently at Rohana too in the south. As Dīpavamsa repeatedly records [See Ch. xviii.], the knowledge of these nuns of the Tripiṭaka seems to have been all inclusive.

Target of Envy and Attack

We also discover that this tremendous success in the cultural growth of Sri Lanka, within such a short time, in this part of the world, with a geo-physical and more or less ethnic independence of its own, seems to have appeared to many ethnic sub-groups in peninsular India of the Deccan a thorn in the flesh. To many of them, this may have appeared a veritable threat to their survival. And this for two reasons. The first is the emergence of a vast religio-cultural empire on both sides of their homeland of the Deccan. On the southern side, the threat of Sri

Lanka emerging as a new progressive religious block, with very close ties with Asoka's Buddhist India in the north. The other would invariably have been, particularly after the Kalinga war of annexation of Asoka, the rise of Sri Lanka on the southern edge of their homeland, as a political power with equally strong alliances with the Asokan empire of the north.

Early monastic literary and historical records of Pali Commentaries known as *Aṭṭhakathā* [or *Vihāravamsa Aṭṭhakathā*], the Pali chronicles like the **Mahāvamsa** and the **Dīpavamsa**, and the village level popular records like the **Rasavāhinī** and the **Sahassavatthu** written in the Pali language, all know of the distressing episodes of regular invasions from the neighboring subcontinent.

These neighboring communities must have also entertained on their own, expansionist political ideas of finding in Sri Lanka, as a growing up new political unit, new pastures for their own over growing native populations. Sri Lanka, they would have very naturally believed, could possibly offer them more land for settlement of people, more opportunities for employment and more chances for acquiring wealth by whatever means, fair or foul. The concentration of non-Sri Lankans [or inhabitants of Dravidian or South Indian origin] we discover today in the more northern regions of the island clearly points towards this.

It is this vision of fulfillment of multiple needs and requirements, we believe, that perhaps led from time to time to the infiltration into Sri Lanka of inhabitants of peninsular India. They undoubtedly did use force and come as invaders in groups of varying magnitude, large or small. Once within the island, they did use violence and rob, plunder and even kill to gain their own ends. Depending on the degree of success, they even set up petty provincial power pockets and claimed themselves rulers over the region or the community. Thus they came to possess claims for traditional homelands. Within a hundred years after the introduction of Buddhism, Anuradhapura came to be under the rule of a Tamil king by the name of Elara.

Menacing Hostile Neighbours in Action

Sri Lankan history records that what began as a positive threat to peace and prosperity of the island country in and around the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, namely violent militant attacks from neighboring India, continued intermittently thereafter for many more centuries. The eminent Sri Lankan historian, Senarat Paranavitana records as follows.

"The Buddhist religion suffered great calamities during the Cola occupation and the extensive monasteries which flourished at Anuradhapura and other places in the tenth century were abandoned. The dagabas were broken into, and the valuables deposited in their relic-chambers were plundered." [University History of Ceylon Vol.I. p.563.].

It is in this very complex situation of political ramification that disastrous threats to the newly established Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka were showing themselves up in many ways. The invader from the neighboring subcontinent seems, in the first instance, to have been keener and sharper on the destruction and elimination of whatever were the external mainstays of the new religion.

The invaders seem to have worked on their mission of destruction with Machiavellian ingenuity. Speaking of these assaults on Buddhism in Anuradhapura, it is said that their main target was the Buddhist monk. Physical attacks were directed at him. The miscreants tore apart the robes the monks wore. Their begging bowls were plundered and damaged. The life of the monk in the midst of this unseen enemy was insecure.

The invader also ruthlessly attacked Buddhist places of worship like the Bodhi trees which they mercilessly cut down and the stupas which they broke into in search of valuables deposited therein [*thūpādisu asakkāraṃ karonte Damiḷe tathā*. Mhv. Ch. xxiii. v. 9]. The impetuous behavior of this infiltrating

invader was unspeakably sacrilegious. This threat to Buddhism was not any less dreadful than the sword of Democlese of classical mythology. It made little sense to the people of the time as well as to those who ruled the country [both who valued their newly inherited religious culture well above their lives] to take lightly the danger of these events.

Variegated Records of Bitter History

The Rasavāhinī describes these vividly and in great detail as follows.

*Anurādhapuraṃ rammam saggakhaṇḍaṃ ' va bhāsuraṃ
akaṃsu Daṃḷā sabbam susānaṃ viya āmaṃ.
Cetiyaṇi ca bhindiṃsu mālakā ' pi manoramā
chaḍḍitā tā samantā ' suṃ manussakuṇapākulā.
Chindanti abhiruhitvāna mahitaṃ suranarādihi
dumindaṃ tassa sākhā ca sandussenti malādihi.
Buddharūpāni bhindantā vasantā paṭimāghare
anācāraṃ karonte te tiracchānā ' va Dāmiḷā
Disvāna bhikkhavo tattha acchindanti ca cīvare
bhindanti chattapatte ' pi khipantā kaṭhalādayo.*

Rasavāhinī pp.79-80 Saraṇatissa 1907

These ethnic and religious bickerings which were inflicted by the neighbors on the smaller island community of the Sinhala who were Buddhists would not have been, in the early stages, anything more than nibbling on the fringes. However, absence of retaliatory action on the part of the aggrieved Sinhala seems to have been apparently misjudged as weakness. It is through such gradual deterioration on account of gross neglect that Anuradhapura had fallen into the hands of the invader with Elara on the throne.

Time had come, and that within a century after the introduction of Buddhism,

to take serious note of this threat [the threat to the religion and culture of the people], of the menacing neighbor. The ruler at the time, being non-Buddhist and non-Sinhala, [whatever else sense of justice he might have had in his own head or heart according to the author of the Mahāvamsa], sufficient deterrent action does not seem to have been taken to arrest these acts of villainous behavior. The people of the land, grieving over the threatening disaster, and the absence of any law enforcement to rectify the situation, evidently had to take the law into their hands. Wherever they detected and discovered the miscreants, the justifiably angered people dealt with them severely. The depletion of the population of the menacing invader appears to have even been reported to the king who at that stage seems to have initiated investigation. Rasavāhinī once again details out these in the following.

*Devabrahmasurādīhi muddhanā nicca maṇḍitaṃ
saggāpavaggasukhadam sammāsambuddhasāsanaṃ
nāsentī Damiḷā ' dāni kapparukkham 'va agginā
ayuttaṃ tam udikkhitvā saddhen 'edha upakkhituṃ.
mantvāna Nandi te Damiḷe gahetvā jātakodhasā
ūrum akkamma pādena hatthena itaran tu so.
Gahetvā sampadāletvā bahikkhipati thāmavā
devā antaradhāpentī tena khittaṃ kalebaram.
Evamevaṃ nisā ' gamma karonte tena anvahaṃ
Damiḷānaṃ khayaṃ disvā janā rañño nivedayūṃ.
Sahasā gaṇhath 'enan ' ti rājā tesaṃ niyojayī.*

Rasavāhinī p. 80

King Kākavaṇṇa Tissa [Kāvantissa] of Rohana in the south, father of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī [101-77 B.C.], had already sensed the danger of these infiltrations. He was no political imbecile. He was conscious of the need to safeguard the political integrity of the island country and the cultural identity of its people. This is the major threat which Sri Lanka was facing a generation before the time of

Duṭṭhagāmaṇī.

History shows us that growth of religious power is, both then and now, as much a cause of envy and bitter hostility as the triumphs of political power. Through historical studies one can discover the vicissitudes of Buddhism in South India in the centuries that followed, almost to a point of total expulsion of Buddhism from that region. It is in this same line of aggression and encroachment that the attacks on the cultural achievements of Sri Lanka made their way to the island in this very early period.

Emerging from such a historical context, we are not surprised that Duṭṭhagāmaṇī had to take a firm decision to get down to action. There is not the slightest doubt that he had studied his brief very carefully and was confident of his line of action. It had been well sensed and sorted out for him. To his father, the strategy was already known. Our literary sources like the Mahāvamsa and the Rasavāhinī, though of course at different levels of authenticity and acceptability, are full of information about what Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's father, Kākavaṇṇa Tissa, with his political sagacity, had done in anticipation to arrest the incoming tide of political infiltration. Being the ruler of the south of the island, he knew the path of the invader. He picked up a midway point at Dīghavāpī and appointed his second son Tissa there as the provincial ruler, **to look after its security**, after **setting up adequate granaries and garrisons**.

*Rājā rājasutaṃ Tissaṃ Dīghavāpimhi vāsaya
āraṅkhituṃ janapadaṃ sampannabalavāhiniṃ.*

Mahāvamsa Ch. xxiv. v. 2

*Rājā ' pi tesam gāma-nigama-khetta-vatthu-ādīni datvā Tissakunāraṃ
janapada-rakkaṇatthaṃ balavāhane datvā Dīghavāpiṃ pesesi.*

Rasavāhinī p. 66

The Rise of a Defender of the Faith

Seeing and hearing of what was happening around him, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī had no alternative but to conclude that time was ripe for action. The situation was more than provocative and he felt his military strength was adequate for the task.

*Kumāro Gāmaṇī kāle sampassanto balaṃ sakaṃ
yujjhissaṃ Damiḷehī ' ti piturañño kathāpayi*

Mahāvamsa Ch. xxiv. v. 3

*[Gāmaṇī kumāro] so hatth-assa-ratha-pādādi-caturaṅga-senaṃ dasa-
mahā-yodhe ca passanto idāni Damiḷehi saddhiṃ yujjhissāmī ' ti cintetvā
taṃ pavattiṃ rañño kathāpesi. Kālo ' yaṃ me lokasāsanānuggahaṃ
kātuṃ. Tato me taṃ anujānātū ' ti.*

Rasavāhinī p. 66

On this issue of when exactly to strike the enemy, both the Mahāvamsa and the Rasavāhinī highlight the disagreement between the father and the son. Out of an extra sense of security for his son [*rājā taṃ anurakkhanto*], the father seems to have dissuaded him from going into battle at that moment. But reviewing the father's apprehension of the threat of the invader and his earlier line of action of military preparation referred to above, we cannot but point out an error of judgement when the chronicles make the father say ' **that the land south of the river is enough for us** ' [*oragaṅgaṃ alaṃ iti*. Mhv. xxiv. v. 4]. These words put into the mouth of the father, suggesting a total abandonment of the encounter with the enemy, does not, in our opinion, make the father necessarily a seeker after peace. It is no more than a bit of misconceived showmanship.

Chroniclers Bungle

The chronicles make a ridiculously mock dramatic situation of getting the

son, in retaliation, to send his father ' **ornaments befitting a woman** ' in chastisement of his alleged cowardice, not living up to his manly courage.

*Pitā me puriso honto n ' evaṃ vakkhati ten ' idaṃ
pilandhatū ' ti pesesi itthālaṅkāram assa so.*

Mhv. Ch. xxiv. v. 5, Rasavāhinī p. 68

In an attempt to illogically glorify Duṭṭhagāmaṇī as a hero of a unique type, we see the Mahāvamsa making a couple of serious blunders like this. We shall handle them in due course.

Chapter xxv of the Mahāvamsa sees Duṭṭhagāmaṇī setting out in full battle array to fight the enemy beyond his own kingdom in the south [pāraṅgaṃ gamissāmi], to make the religion of the Buddha shine in its full glory [jotetuṃ sāsanaṃ aham]. Judging by what has preceded this situation in Sri Lanka history, and not deliberately putting the telescope on the blind eye, we have every reason to believe the honesty of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī ' s motive. He knew the cause for which he was fighting.

Sri Lanka was predominantly the land of the Sihalas. Buddhism was their religion and in those early years the entire culture pattern of the land was based on Buddhism. Whoever ruled the land had to be a defender of the faith of the people. As Duṭṭhagāmaṇī goes out to war with the invader, he has to take with him what was symbolic of the cause for which he was fighting. So in his own symbol of royalty, **namely the royal sceptre which was carried ahead of him wherever he went**, he had the relics of the Buddha deposited [*kunte dhātuṃ nidhāpetvā* Mhv. Ch.xxv. v.1].

The people of Sri Lanka, down the centuries, fully understood the significance of this.

The Pali Thūpavamsa while talking of the story of the Mirisaveṭṭiya uses this

same reference to the *kunta* with the relics. The ancient Sinhala translation of this work which belongs to the 13th century, translates this as *dhātu sahita jayakontaya*. This means the imperial sceptre with the relics deposited in it. Furthermore, subsequent Sinhala literature of the early period, following the Sinhala translation of the Thupavaṃsa referred to above, very definitely emphasize the idea of the *kunta* as **the royal sceptre**. While the Saddharmālaṅkāraya [14th century] repeats the Thūpavaṃsaya phrase *dhātu sahita jayakontaya*, adding also the phrase *magul kontaya*, the Saddharmaratnākaraya [15th century] has the phrase *dhātu pihiṭuvū jayamaha kontaya*.

Criminal Errors in the Hands of Translators

The misunderstanding and consequent mistranslating of this vital sentence *kunte dhātuṃ nidhāpetvā* by an early Buddhist scholar monk of Sri Lanka [1912], and followed without question by equally eminent lay professors has led to calamitous results.

George Turner who was the first to translate the Mahāvaṃsa into English, and that as far back as 1837, although not a son of the soil, clearly grasped and sized up the historical circumstances of the Duṭugemuṇu Elāra war, showing complete familiarity with the authentic Sri Lankan tradition which apparently had suffered no contamination so far. Turner translates the word *kunta* as the sceptre and imperial sceptre. Wijesinghe's second edition of 1889 carries the same rendering intact.

Around 1887 Hikkhaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera appears to have completed his Sinhala translation of the Mahāvaṃsa and this came out in print in 1912. What sort of historical tradition or inspirational background he had immediately before him, we are not certain. But in translating the word *kunta*, he

first used the identical term *kuntaya* in Sinhala [Ch.25. v.1] and at its second occurrence at Ch. 26. v. 9. translates it as *kuntāyudhaya*, i.e. the weapon *kunta*. This, we are compelled to call **a grave error of very serious consequences**. This has enabled later writers on Sri Lankan history to give the national and religious consciousness of the day an unfortunately malicious slant.

We have clearly indicated above, and in great detail, the circumstances which compelled Duṭṭhagāmaṇī to go into battle against the foreign invader who was wrecking Buddhism and its cultural heritage in the island. It was **necessarily a war of defense and liberation**. He was going to fight it out like a gentleman. Even his treatment of dead Elara who fell in battle establishes this beyond doubt. We are quite certain that he would not descend so low as to carry relics of the Buddha in a spear-like killer weapon or *āyudhaya*.

This identification of the *kunta* as a spear is a scandalous wedlock and carries with it a taint of vulgarity which tarnishes the exalted character of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī. It is this same royal sceptre with relics of the Buddha deposited therein which he took along with him when he went to war that he used subsequently, in time of peace, as a symbol of royalty, when he went for water sports in the Tisāwewa. The story would have it that this sceptre associated with the war got immovably fixed on the ground where it was placed during the king's bathing. It had to be buried there for ever. This is the origin of the Mirisaveṭiya stūpa which was built over it, terminating, as it were, all associations with war. First ever act of disarmament, as it were.

Historical Incidents Misjudged and Misreported

The most important and equally controversial in the life of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī are the reports about his post-war reactions. Few scholars, as far as we know, seem to be aware that these reports are decisively divided. They come from two

entirely different camps. The Mahāvamsa, and its very close village-level follower, the Rasavāhinī, take the view that Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, after his final triumph over the invader, was taken with remorse over the loss of life during the battles. That he had to crush as many as thirty two provincial rulers or sub-kings of the enemy [*dvattiṃsa Damiḷa-rājāno vijitvā*] is widely known to everybody. This physical destruction of the enemy is what decides victory in war. No body goes to war without an awareness of this need to crush the enemy.

Some Sri Lankan chroniclers or history writers [in the Mahāvamsa and in the Rasavāhinī] who obviously are familiar with the story of Asoka of India and are over enthusiastic about identifying their own hero Duṭṭhagāmaṇī with Asoka **as a great Buddhist king** in as many details as possible, seem to attempt to create a parallel in the story of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī with Asoka's post-Kalinga-war lament over the loss of life in battle. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī himself is made to make this confession of guilt of causing the death of people in battle to a **visiting team of arahants**, who are dramatically brought on the scene, flying through the air.

Duṭṭhagāmaṇī is made to express his regret and remorse in the following words.

*Kathannu bhante assāso mama hessati yena me
akkhohiṇīmahāsenāghāto kārāpito iti.*

Mahāvamsa Ch. xxv. 108 & Rasavāhinī p. 76

How can there be comfort to me, O Sirs, me who has brought about the death of many men in battle?

Compare what Asoka says after his Kalinga war of annexation, as recorded in the Rock Edict XII: "**The Beloved of the Gods felt profound sorrow and regret because the conquest of a people previously unconquered involves slaughter, death and deportation.**"

But one is not to forget the circumstances that prompted these two national heroes in two different parts of the world. **They undoubtedly stand on two**

different pedestals.

A Non-Buddhist Solution - Both Clumsy and Incompatible

Poetic ingenuity and dramatic creativity of these Sri Lankan chroniclers seem to have led them to the fabrication of these historical absurdities. Having put their **good king** into this historically absurd situation of regret, remorse and repent, the chroniclers fabricate equally fanciful stories of **arahants coming from the northern islands** to console him.

*Piyaṅgudīpe arahanto ñatvā taṃ tassa takkitam
aṭṭhārahante pāhesuṃ tamassāsetum issaram.*

Mhv. Ch. xxv. v. 104

They are made to tell the king that among those killed in the war, one only had taken the three-fold refuge and yet another one only had accepted the observance of the five precepts. Therefore **the total killed amounted to only one and half humans**. The rest are no better than animals [*sesā pasusamā matā* Mhv. Ch. xxv. v. 110]. On the basis of this argument, the so-called arahants are made to absolve the king of his self-pronounced guilt of man slaughter in the battle. This, we believe, is a disastrous distortion of facts, unnecessarily fabricated and complicated, whether deliberate or otherwise.

Modern Researchers and Their Perpetuation of Heresies

It is extremely lamentable to find Sri Lankan researchers of recent times who

take these references as gospel truth. One does not know whether it is in blissful ignorance of the other side of the story or in deliberate mischief. We maintain that both are equally disastrous and ruinous.

We discover in the Vihāravamaṣa Aṭṭhakathā [Historical Records of the Monasteries], as against the chronicles like the Mahāvamaṣa, an entirely different presentation of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī 's post-war reactions. We have repeatedly, and we believe convincingly pointed out the historical realities of pre-Duṭṭhagāmaṇī Sri Lanka, specially with regard to the temperament of the contemporary non-Sinhala ethnic groups living in the northern regions of Sri Lanka, particularly in the neighbourhood of the cultural centre of Anuradhapura.

At least over a period of two generations, these injuries and insults in the hands of the invaders had been suffered by the native Sinhala who were legitimately rejoicing over the cultural heritage they had received from the Buddhist Emperor Asoka of North India. Whoever thought they had a right to call themselves rulers of this land had also to come forward to redress this situation, to safeguard the newly inherited nearly global Buddhist culture and to enable the people of the land to live in peace and prosperity. Two generations of royalty in the south, King Kāvantissa and his household, we believe the father and the mother and the two sons, were getting painfully sensitive to this. The strategy was carefully planned over decades, as is clearly evident, first by the father, and lines of action carefully thought out. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī only took over the reins at the correct time, and moved into action with the unanimous support of the people of the land.

Under his command, he had a band of well-trained dedicated and loyal soldiers, swordsmen, archers, horsemen etc. who accompanied him on this triumphant march. On his way from the south to Anuradhapura, he had to meet as many as thirty two provincial rulers whom he crushed completely [*dvattiṃsa* *Damīla-rājāno vijitvā*]. Finally Duṭṭhagāmaṇī slew Elara in a hand to hand fight in

Anuradhapura. He was thereupon anointed king over the territory. Knowing fully well what Duṭṭhagamaṇī embarked upon in this venture, it only requires a reasonable degree of sanity to determine his post war mood.

Revelation of the Truth

The Vihāravamsa Aṭṭhakathā referred to above [which we believe belongs to an older and more authentic and unbiased tradition than the Chronicles] records precisely what we believe would have been Duṭṭhagāmaṇī 's feelings after his triumph in **this war of liberation**. Here is the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, Commentary to the Dīgha Nikāya, recording this with commendable precision.

Ayaṃ pana attho Duṭṭhagāmaṇī Abhayavatthunā dīpetabbo. So kira dvattiṃsa Damiḷarājāno vijitvā Anurādhapure pattābhiseko laddha-somanassena māsaṃ niddaṃ na labhi. Tato niddaṃ na labhāmi bhante ' ti bhikkhusaṅghassa ācikkhi. Tena hi mahārāja ajja pāto ' va uposathaṃ adhiṭṭhāhī ' ti. So uposathaṃ adhiṭṭhāsī. Saṅgho gantvā Cittayamakaṃ sajjhāyathā ' ti aṭṭha Ābhidhammika-bhikkhū pesesi. Te gantvā Nipajja tvaṃ mahārājā ' ti vatvā sajjhāyaṃ ārabhiṃsu. Rājā sajjhāyaṃ suṇanto ' va niddaṃ okkami... Natthi bho mayhaṃ ayyakassa dārakānaṃ ajānana-bhesajjaṃ nama. Yāva niddā-bhesajjaṃ ' pi jānanti yevā ' ti āha.

Sumaṅgalavilāsinī DA. PTS. II. p.640

Sumaṅgalavilāsinī II. Simon Hevavitara Bequest XIX. p.452

The meaning of this is to be clarified with the aid of the story of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī Abhaya. As for him - **He having conquered thirty two Tamil rulers, was anointed as king in Anuradhapura and on account of the joy he gained, he could not sleep for a month**. Thereupon he informed the community of monks that he could not sleep. [They replied] If that were so,

your majesty, this morning itself you observe the Uposatha. He did take upon himself the observance of the Uposatha. The Sangha sent eight Ābhidhammika monks, asking them to go and chant the Citta-yamaka selection [of the Samyutta Nikaya]. They went and asking the king to lie down, commenced the recital. The king, as he listened to the recital, fell asleep. The king remarked: There is no medicine that the disciples of my Master do not know. They even know sleep-inducing-medicine.

Translated by the author.

This bit of evidence from the Aṭṭhakathā is in itself self-explanatory. As far as researchers on Sri Lankan history are concerned, we have yet to see any one who has any idea at all about this side of the story. Whether it is in blissful ignorance or in a bid to conceal what is not in favour of one's own preconceived notions, we have yet to pronounce judgement.

Most of these problems have been thoroughly examined by the present author in 1987 while he was a layman [Professor Jotiya Dhirasekera], in his annual lecture at the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka [See Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka - *New Series Volume XXXII* - 1989. pp. 25-44. Art. **Dutugemunu Episode Re-examined.**].

In our opinion, one of the first to be put off on to the wrong track in this area of research or plain history writing is Rev. Walpola Rahula in his **History of Buddhism in Ceylon -1956**. We shall take only a few statements of his as typical instances of misinterpretation, both as a result of inadequate examination of data which should have been examined and as a result of over enthusiasm for chastisement generated through misconceptions.

See what he says on p.79. " Duṭṭhagāmaṇī ... organized a great campaign to liberate Buddhism from foreign rule. "

We have clearly shown above that at this time there was **the urgent need to**

liberate Buddhism. But ' from what and from whom ' should be the next specific question of a researcher. The **menacing threat** from which **Buddhism was suffering at the time** is not to be overlooked or minimized. Historically, **the stress is not on the foreign rule.** Rahula is here unfortunately **using an unwarranted inflammatory slogan.**

On the same page, he continues with the following. " This was the beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese. ... A kind of **religio-nationalism**, which **almost amounted to fanaticism**, roused the whole Sinhalese people. "

This, we maintain, is more than he could honestly and legitimately say. The Mahāvamsa nowhere uses the word *Sinhala* in this context.

He persists [still on p.79], this time swallowing in its totality the most gullible story of the Mahāvamsa of Flying Arahants from the northern islands who come **to console the grieving king.** We are sorry that he either mischievously ignores the Aṭṭhakathā evidence of the Sumaṅgalavilāsini about the **sense of triumph of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī** quoted earlier or is lamentably unaware of it. Consequently he concludes: " A non-Buddhist was not regarded as a human being, " [*sesā pasusamā matā* Mhv. Ch. xxv.110]

These are all instances of **incorrect recording** and **reporting** as well as **incorrect interpretation** in the hands generations of writers, call them historians, researchers or analysts or whatever you will.

A Word to World Scholarship and Research

Finally, to say the least, it is irreparably damaging to find in an Oxford University Press [1994] publication, the two errors under discussion. The correction of these, which we have published as far back as 1987, i.e. seven years earlier, are repeated *in toto* in what we consider their incorrect form. And

apparently weighty arguments are built upon them. See **RELIGION, THE MISSING DIMENSION OF STATECRAFT** - Edited by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson. Oxford University Press, 1994. p. 309 f.

" It is recorded that in the second century B.C.E., King Duttagamani (" Gamani, the ferocious ") went to war with a non-Buddhist king, **bearing a relic of the Buddha on his spear**. He eventually won a bloody victory, but when, as a good Buddhist, **he expressed remorse for all people he had killed**, he was informed by some monks that he need only worry about two of the victims, who happened to be Buddhists. No mercy was due to the others, said the monks, because the non-Buddhists were " not more to be esteemed than beasts."

What a catastrophic **misinterpretation** based on **misinformation**. It is our conviction that these references to the **relic of the Buddha on his spear** as well as **remorse for all people he had killed** have both to be dumped in the garbage bin, in the face of historical realities. In our search for a real solution to the problem, the story of the **Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka** must **be re-studied with sanity and sobriety**. International interference or pressure from anywhere is by no means the answer.

But on p. 272, the book we refer to has this well framed sentence which, we believe, could be used to handle the situation of the Duṭṭhagāmaṇī war from a more sensible angle. Talking of Emperor Ashoka of India to whom we have referred many times in this paper, the book adds the following.

"He then went on to try to forge **a kingdom in which the various religions could dwell together peaceably**. Even more importantly, he decided that his commitment to the "middle way" of the Buddha, **although it allowed for self-defence**, excluded all **wars of aggression**. " [Emphasis mine].

Herein lies a lesson for posterity. Look for it clearly.

